

# Photos of Bishop Donald E. Pelotte

Taken July 23, 2007, by the Gallup Police Department

## Pelotte

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about the former seminary student who had been charged with attempted murder in 2004 after confessing to Gallup Police that he had tried to poison an elderly nun. That charge was eventually plea bargained down to harassment. In 2005, the diocese issued a news release stating the same young man had threatened to kill Pelotte. Nothing ever came of that allegation other than a scheduled probation revocation hearing that kept being postponed. Lujan told the reporter that in the days after Pelotte's injury, other people had raised their concerns about this former seminarian.

However, in an Aug. 9, 2007, interview with the Catholic News Service, Lujan backed away from those earlier remarks. According to the CNS story, Lujan offered three denials: "It didn't ever occur to me that he was beaten," he is reported as saying, "I didn't mean to speculate that he was assaulted," and "It never occurred to me that he was attacked."

The CNS reported that Lujan's "comment to the investigating police officer that the bishop 'really looks beaten up' was taken differently in the officer's report" than Lujan had intended it. Lujan also speculated to the news service that Pelotte's "recurring minor bouts of

malaria" which cause him to feel dizzy and weak could have contributed to a fall down the stairs.

In terms of missed opportunities, the Gallup Police have been criticized for declining to search Pelotte's home as requested by the ER technician who placed the 911 call and for not pursuing any interviews with the former seminary student who allegedly threatened Pelotte. They also accepted the recollections of Pelotte, a trauma patient, who was later said to be suffering from traumatic brain injury.

As for Pelotte, the District Court Clerk filed an entry of default against him in the civil complaint filed by the city of

Gallup over the legal battle for the police photos because he didn't hire an attorney to represent him in the case. It's unclear why Pelotte forfeited his opportunity for legal counsel.

And like the tangled events in this unfolding drama have been open to different perspectives, even "experts" have viewed Pelotte's injuries differently. On Aug. 6, 2007, Robert Cron, the acting Gallup police chief and a longtime law enforcement officer, was quoted in the Gallup Herald as saying, "From what I see, it seems reasonable to believe that the bishop did fall down the stairs."

"We do not have an active

investigation of what occurred to the bishop," Cron was quoted as saying in the next week's edition. "The bishop said he fell down the stairs, so there is nothing to investigate."

And apparently different experts in forensic pathology have reached somewhat different conclusions. On Monday, KRQE's Larry Barker interviewed Dr. Kris Sperry, a forensic pathologist who is the chief medical examiner for the State of Georgia. Sperry believes Pelotte was the victim of a terrible beating. On Thursday, KOAT interviewed Dr. Thomas Bennett, an associate state medical examiner and forensic pathologist from Montana, who said

many of Pelotte's injuries were consistent with a fall. However, because of the injuries to Pelotte's hands, Bennett added that he "cannot rule out" that the bishop was assaulted.

Even Pelotte has offered conflicting views of his injuries. For the last year, the former bishop has insisted he was injured falling down his stairs. After being shown the police photographs by KRQE's Barker, Pelotte said he no longer believes the injuries were caused by a fall. "When you see those pictures there's no way that I could have gotten that damage by falling down the stairs," he said. "But I don't remember that."

## Pelotte's plight compared to Jesus crucifixion

By Elizabeth Hardin-Burrola  
Staff writer

GALLUP — The diocesan official who discovered the severely injured Bishop Donald E. Pelotte last year issued an emotional statement Thursday, the day the police photographs were released to the general public.

Deacon Timoteo Lujan, the chancellor for the Diocese of Gallup, repeated his objection to the release of the photos, denied there was any cover-up concerning the circumstances of Pelotte's injuries, and compared the sufferings of the former Gallup bishop to the crucified Christ. Lujan's news release, in its entirety, is as follows:

"The Catholic faithful of our diocese — who have known and loved Bishop Donald Pelotte throughout his 22 years of service to New Mexico and beyond — continue their prayers for him during his ongoing recovery. The publication of the bishop's photos, taken without his consent while he lay in the hospital as a private citizen and medical patient, add unnecessary stress not only to the bishop, but to the people who have

intimately loved him as their spiritual father.

"On the day of July 23, 2007, when Bishop Pelotte was admitted to a Gallup hospital, the physicians attending to him were responsible for his healing; the police who came out of procedure to question and photograph the bishop were there to determine the cause of his injuries; and I was there, as chancellor and as the bishop's spiritual brother to care for him.

"Let me make it clear that the Catholic Church lives out the Gospel with truth and integrity, and this includes this situation. We are not covering up — as some have alluded to — any information pertaining to the cause or nature of Bishop Pelotte's injuries. It is the responsibility of the emergency services in Gallup to investigate or determine that. Our job as a faithful Catholic people is to continue our spiritual support of our brother, Bishop Donald Pelotte.

"The only consolation we have in this whole tragic affair is that, like our Lord, Bishop Pelotte is being ridiculed and mistreated. He must surely be identifying closely with the experience of Jesus, whose wounds and nakedness were put on display by the Romans at the Crucifixion."

